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SUBJECT: IVLP ALUMNI BREAKFAST DISCUSSES LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES

REF: NONE

¶1. SUMMARY: The Ambassador recently hosted a breakfast discussion for IVLP returnees, the seventh in a series that has now become an established routine here. This latest event brought together eight recent IVLP alumni who are locally elected officials from different regions and cities in France for a discussion of "Local Governance in the U.S." and how it compares to the French experience. END SUMMARY.

¶2. On September 28, Ambassador Stapleton hosted the seventh in a series of alumni breakfast discussions that have now become a successful tradition at this post. This breakfast brought together eight IVLP alumni, who are local and regional government officials, to discuss their exchange experiences, in general, and to compare, more specifically, U.S. and French perspectives on local governance. A major theme of the discussion was the relative lack of involvement/interest from French citizens in politics and the challenge this poses in terms of advancing a common agenda.

¶3. The participants were:

- Andree BUCHMANN, Vice-President of Regional Council for Les Verts (Green Party), IV 1994
- Alexandre GALDIN, Elected City Advisor for UMP (Conservative Party), IV 2006
- Sebastien HUYGHE, Member of the National Assembly for UMP, IV 2006
- Loick LE BRUN, City Councilor for UMP, IV 2002
- Denis LEROY, City Councilor for the Socialist Party, Member of the electoral team of Segolene Royal, IV 2000
- Thierry MANDON, Mayor for the Socialist Party, IV 1992

- Dorothee PINEAU, Regional Counselor for UDF, Assistant Mayor of Boulogne-Billancourt, IV 2000

- Jacques VERNIER, Mayor for UMP, IV 1987

¶4. Welcoming the guests along with the Ambassador and participating in the discussion were the DCM, POL Min-Counselor, PA Min-Counselor, ECON Officer, and ACAO Exchanges Officer.

¶5. All of the guests had an opportunity to speak, and each explained how important his or her trip to the U.S. was to understanding how Americans address issues of local governance, including economic development, integration policies, and the role of elected officials. The visit contradicted their common belief that U.S. city centers were abandoned, as they were able to appreciate the proliferation and efficiency of public/private partnerships in urban development and revitalization. This led to a discussion of the current situation in France, where problems of urban violence and lack of integration are aggravated by a general lack of interest by citizens in the res publica.

¶6. With French presidential elections coming up next May, the issue of participatory democracy is on the lips of every candidate, yet the challenge remains how to inspire citizens to become more active in building their future. The alumni praised the various forms of citizen actions, initiatives and sense of community in the U.S., which they see as a key objective for their cities. While they seemed at a loss to determine exactly how they could reach this objective, they did agree that the use of new technologies (including blogs) is essential to ensuring French politicians are informed of opinion trends and can participate in on-going debates.

¶7. Lessons learned: The experience of these breakfast encounters reaffirms for us the continuing relevance of the IVLP and VolVis exchange programs to Mission efforts to influence the public debate in France. On the subject of local governance, the exchange experience in the U.S. gave these elected officials new information about the U.S. that provides models for encouraging greater participation by citizens in France's democracy. Post will continue follow up with these USG exchange alumni and continue to involve them in our public diplomacy program activities.

STAPLETON